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DEFENSE FOR OASD/ISP (J. HURSCH AND J. KELSO)
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SUBJECT: ICELAND: AFGHANISTAN AND KOSOVO VIEWS IN ADVANCE OF NATO
MINISTERIAL

REF: A. STATE 7434

- 1B. STATE 4834
- 1C. STATE 5652
- 1D. B. EVANS EMAIL 1/22/07
- 1E. 06 KABUL 5855
- 1F. 06 REYKJAVIK 431

Classified By: Amb. Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Iceland is supportive of USG goals for the NATO informal ministerial on Afghanistan and Kosovo on January 26. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) Permanent Secretary outlined for Ambassador the Icelandic government's plans to increase peacekeeping deployments to Afghanistan, including discussions with Hungary on PRT deployments. Iceland is also considering contributions to law and order and counter-narcotics programs, and at the ministerial will confirm the Prime Minister's Riga pledge of NATO airlift funding. Ambassador also explored ways to raise public awareness of Iceland's contributions in Afghanistan, including the idea of a visit to the country by the Prime Minister after parliamentary elections here in May. On Kosovo, Iceland intends to support the Ahtisaari plan but will wait until an opportune time to say so publicly. The MFA expects that a Nordic-Baltic Political Directors' meeting in February will result in a consensus to support the plan. End summary.

12. (SBU) In the Foreign Minister's absence, Ambassador called on MFA Permanent Secretary Gretar Mar Sigurdsson on January 22 to present USG thoughts ahead of the NATO informal ministerial later this week. Foreign Minister Valgerdur Sverrisdottir, who will represent Iceland, is traveling in Europe ahead of the meeting.

13. (SBU) Regarding Afghanistan, Ambassador thanked Sigurdsson for Iceland's contributions in Afghanistan, particularly the well-regarded Mobile Liaison Observation Team assigned to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Chaghcharan (ref E). At the same time, she noted that the pressure is on for NATO to deliver this spring, and that all Allies must take a hard look at what more they can offer. Sigurdsson said it was good to hear that the Icelandic team is appreciated and noted that despite the team's planned withdrawal in April 2007, some personnel currently assigned to the PRT will remain there in other roles. When the Ambassador suggested that Iceland might find another niche for itself in pairing up with NATO members who were to lead their first PRTs, the PermSec agreed, noting that Iceland has just begun discussions with Hungary on possible cooperation in a Hungarian-led PRT, with two specific projects (one of which centers on police training) under discussion.

¶4. (SBU) Sigurdsson passed Ambassador a copy of his talking points on Afghanistan for recent bilateral security talks in the UK, noting that the document gave a good preview of what FM Sverrisdottir would have to present in Brussels this week. The document (scanned and emailed to EUR/NB) outlines a planned increase of the total number of Icelanders deployed to Afghanistan, though as Sigurdsson noted their roles will shift to areas in which Iceland believes it has a "core competency." (Note: it also confirms Prime Minister Geir Haarde's pledge at Riga to fund airlift of personnel and supplies. End Note.)

Sigurdsson offered that this was in line with the FM's emphasis on shaping Iceland's peacekeeping participation in ways that would be able to be clearly understood and supported across Iceland's political spectrum (ref F).

¶5. (C) Ambassador expressed appreciation for Iceland's continued engagement and plans for increased support to Afghanistan, though she cautioned that even "safe-sounding" roles such as midwife training can be dangerous peacekeeping assignments. It could send misleading signals to lead the public to believe that peacekeeping deployments in unstable regions did not involve risk simply because Icelandic participants did not wear uniforms or were unarmed. She urged the government to explain clearly to the parliament and the public why these missions were important to do despite acknowledged danger. Continuing this theme, Ambassador suggested that the period following Iceland's Althingi (parliament) elections this May might be an excellent time for the Prime Minister (Haarde or his successor) to visit Afghanistan to show support for Iceland's work there and raise public awareness of the importance of Iceland's contribution to Afghan development and stability. Sigurdsson enthusiastically agreed, noting as well that it might go one better to send the Althingi Foreign Affairs Committee, "which doesn't travel enough." He noted that FM Sverrisdottir is making a concerted effort to engage the Althingi on security and defense issues, including peacekeeping, in an effort to bury lingering resentment of the cabinet's tendency to unilateral control of foreign affairs.

¶6. (C) Along these lines, Sigurdsson said Iceland should and will look to increase its participation in "traditional" PRT roles in the coming years, possibly even to include having Icelanders under arms. However, in the short term such deployments are not politically tenable. The only way the MFA can elicit such support, he opined, is by moving carefully and bringing the Althingi along at every step. Ambassador acknowledged this point, and pushed the MFA to encourage as much press coverage and high-level attention on Iceland and NATO's work in Afghanistan as possible.

¶7. (SBU) On Kosovo, Ambassador noted the urgency of unified international support for UN Special Representative Ahtisaari's plan for final status. Sigurdsson agreed, and said the U.S. could expect Iceland's support for the plan when the timing was appropriate. MFA Political Director Bergdis Ellertsdottir noted in this vein that she expected an upcoming Nordic-Baltic Political Directors' meeting to produce a consensus of support for Ahtisaari. Sigurdsson opined that perhaps the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-Pine) could be a vehicle for coordinating support to Kosovo.

¶8. (C/NF) Comment: The GOI (and FM Sverrisdottir in particular) is still wrestling with the problem of selling Afghan and other peacekeeping operations to a skeptical public unaccustomed to seeing its citizens in uniform or potentially at risk. Nonetheless, Iceland will be supportive of NATO's goals in Afghanistan, and its willingness to explore PRT cooperation with the Hungarians is a welcome sign.

van Voorst